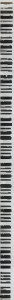


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FROM THE ASOLAN HILLS.



* * * *Only Three Hundred copies printed.*

FROM
THE
ASOLAN HILLS

A POEM BY
EUGENE BENSON

" . . . our delicious Asolo."

ROBERT BROWNING.

" *Asolo vago e piacevole castello posto ne gli stremi gioghi delle nostre Alpi sopra il Trivigiano.*"

BEMBO.

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS
AT THE SIGN OF THE BODLEY HEAD
IN VIGO STREET
1891

CHISWICK PRESS:—CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO., TOOKS COURT,
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PREFACE.

SOME fifteen years ago the Italian poet, Carducci, sauntering with a friend over the Asolan hills, turned to him and said: "Your old land is very beautiful and rich in memories; I will write a poem about it." Again some two years later, at Castelfranco, he was stirred to say he would write an ode about Giorgione. The promised poems remain, I believe, unwritten, and Carducci's friend¹ is dead. But all that moved both on the Asolan heights, overlooking the whole *Marca Trivigiana*, is there still for the seeing eye, for the living mind, a part of nature, or of the story of the country; and much, if not all of it, imposed itself upon me long before I knew of Carducci's promise, or of his friend's enthusiasm so pleasantly expressed in the little book he wrote now ten years ago entitled *Asolando*:²—a title wherein he anticipated that of Mr. Browning's last volume of verse.

The wish to evoke the majesty of long buried life, the thought of it all, came to the Italian poet and his friend;

¹ The lamented Signor G. Valerio Bianchetti.

² *Asolando*: Note inutili di viaggio di Giuseppe Valerio Bianchetti, Venezia, 1881.

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both imaginative enough to respond to the charm of old dead loves, to feel the intense interest of old dead hates, the passion of long ended struggle. Doubtless they evoked the Ecelini, watched the weird Adelaide, followed Cunizza, touched Giorgione's brief life, understood Colonna's "Dream," and knew Fra Gioconda's worth, there, on the Asolan hill, contemplating the very theatre of so many interesting lives, the very cities, or ruins, that yet keep some memory of them, in the enchanting land that lies between the Piave and the Brenta. The last glow of Provençal song was shed over it. It inspired some of the late Mr. Browning's early poetry, and at Asolo he wrote his final verse. I have tried to imagine the aspect of the old Venetian land, seeing it from Asolo as it must have appeared in the very dawn of its history. Beginning with the awakening of Spring, I have looked back to the remote time, when, probably, the famed "Amber Isles"¹ were to be seen from the Asolan hills. And from these same Asolan hills, I seemed to behold the whole drama of the story of the *Marca Trivigiana*, of the ancient Veneto, or Venetian mainland, in the very places it once filled with life.

To express something of it all as it came to me there is both the purpose and the argument of the following pages.

¹ *Insulae Electrides.*

FROM THE ASOLAN HILLS.

*“ Il cantar novo e’l pianger degli augelli
In sul di fanno risentir le valli
E’l mormorar de’ liquidi cristalli
Giu per lucidi freschi rive e snelli.”*

PETRARCA.

PRELUDE.

MOTHER of many voicèd harmonies,
O Mighty Earth! Spring wakens in the skies,
Old Winter, dulled, is in his cave at last,
His glitt'ring shields are gone, his clangor 's past,
And a wind hurries by,—bud, blossom, leaf
Unfolding,—vanished is the wintry thief.
Music all new most sweet doth lightly sound,
And dumb things hear it 'neath the loosened ground.
O swiftly comes the spring gaily to dress
The bare earth in its flow'ry loveliness.
Joyous she calls new life from the dark mould
And hastes to show the flower's disk of gold.
Soon the birds will begin their jocund strife,
The wakened Land with pleasure will be rife.

Upon the plain a fresher green doth merge
Into blue distance,—blue to its dim verge ;
Thro' balmy air pours the clear fleckless light,
And sunny slopes in deeper green are dight.

The coming
of Spring at
Asolo.

Softly as clouds at rest in noonday sky
The hills afar all azurèd now lie,
Their linkèd shapes are like dim dreamy isles,
Afloat they seem beneath day's brightest smiles.

The tepid breeze is soft, the day is clear,
Bland is the sky. The Spring is surely here.
Rust-hued the woods, silent they are and thin.
But yet the Spring is here. Bright flowers begin
To bloom, tho' yet the streams run chill and slow :
But now the violet and primrose show
On sunny banks. The air is delicate,
And locked are harsher winds of winter's state :
Earth shows a virgin breast in sign thereof.
Delicious flatt'ring Spring ! First Mate of Love !
Sweet Spring ! For thee, tender the Day, and pure.
Thou hast come with the Dawn, in light ; to lure,
To enchant, hast come, altho' as yet unseen.
I feel, I know, thou'rt here, tho' nothing green
Doth deck the branch that still is black or grey ;
Yet most delightful Spring is here to-day.
I feel her presence in the sighing wind,
Her very touch in the mild day I find.

I knew her coming by the sighing sound
That rose and fell in all the air around.

For with sighs Spring comes : moans melodious
In bliss breathes forth, and ever stirs in us
A deep unrest, filling the earth anew,
As winds are mild and skies are grey or blue ;
Smoothly to-day the winds come to caress
Something unseen that sleeps in loveliness.
The sun is warm, the sky is all unveiled,
Surely Young Spring from Paradise hath sailed :
Earth was asleep, but wakened at the sigh
The dear Spring sent thro' all the balmy sky.
Her herald blew, the wind, joyously fleet,
From far it blew new life to stir and greet,
But with a sigh sank there when Spring came down.
Spring lightly stepped over the earth all brown,
And on her breast lay prone, in fresh found bliss ;
So the Spring came no rapture here to miss.

O many lovers hath the Earth. The four
Seasons that come, the Four that evermore
Depart. They take their turn Earth to embrace,
And one oft presses the last from its place,
But mighty still is she, Mother of all,
The sky's Four Bright Ones yearly to recall.
Each one in turn, the Seasons Four must come,
And never is the earth to one quite dumb.

No longer now the violet seems to hide,
Tho' dimly seen 'mid leaves on ev'ry side,
Not yet gay daffodils begin to blow,
But soon they'll come with all their yellow glow.
Not yet its clustered stars of white and gold
Narcissus shows ; but pure the snowdrop cold,
Its petals white just tipped with yellow green,
Bends down its head and rarely hides unseen,
Tho' low it looks.

In the bare woods profuse
The purple periwinkle runs all loose.
The marguerite, and dandelion, see,
'Mid the new grass enamelled seem to be.
The wind-flower, lavish on the warmèd ground,
Is gay and frail : O leave it where 't is found,
On naked banks of dells now flourishing,
'T will bear no touch, to winds afluttering,
So bloomy fine, so tremulous and slight,
The wood-side sprinkling o'er with virgin white.
Hepaticas now out I would not miss ;
Nor bluer gentian, for the Spring's first kiss
Now up on high and sunny slopes of hills :
It lures my step across the loosened rills.
Thrilled by Spring's fine touch small things seem to know
'T is time to give delight with beauty's show.
Woosingly blows the wav'ring, tepid wind ;

The tender new-born leaf it comes to find.
The blossoming thorn 's afoam, the wild hedge row,
No longer brown, is white, like purest snow.

Daughters of Light, wild flowers delightful are,
Profuse, or rarely grown, set like a star,
Or deeply petalled ; soft ; laid fold on fold
Like lip to lip, tenderly curved and rolled.
The dearest one that comes ere woods are green
Is the white violet, tho' scarcely seen ;
A thing just lit it seems i' the woods warm nooks,
Close to the ground, modest and still it looks ;
Charming it is, and yet no odour flings
To wooing sweet winds where it lovely springs,
Flowering to delight.

Soft now, the Eve,
Seems pale and dim the quiet Land to leave,
And the full Moon glides on in search of day,
Deep darkness creeps where she sends not a ray,
And the Night brightens all her skyey face
As the Moon, swift, rides thro' the starry space.

FROM THE ASOLAN HILLS.

I.

A spectacle
of Nature.

WOULDST see from Asolo a wondrous sight?
Climb the Asolan hill e'er morning light
Widens the pure all-freshened joyous sky,
And, soundless, the earth's heavy vapours lie—
A thick mist far spread on the Plain below;
As Day dawns, and the sun's first warming glow
Flashes along its high cloud-paven way,
And all the Land is dim, or faintly grey;
Hid is the populous Plain, and in its place
Is seen what seems to be the shining face
Of seas—wide wastes of water now at rest,
Or roughened, by the quick winds raised or prest;
Silvered, immense, spreading all flat and far,
Glittering e'en to the horizon's bar,
Where 'gainst the warm light, rise like bluest isles
The linked hills lifted in lengthen'd files.
Thousands of years ago primitive man
Saw no mirage of mist, illusive, span

The misty Plain, where now it shifting flies,
But the Sea's self spread under these vast skies ;
Valli and *lidi*, and lagoons, and pines
Belting the tortuous channels ; the far lines
Of gleaming water-ways fed by the tide,
Where now the floating fog is scattered wide ;
Where now it breaks, lifts, rolls away, wind-blown,
Sun-smitten ; lo ! where 'tis all quickly flown.
Yes, the sea's flood swept o'er the Plain below,
Its full tides and swift currents,—the far flow
Of living waters underneath the skies
Of other days. But now, where yon bird flies
O'er teeming fields, in depths of purest air,
Old bells of village church make music there ;
Light shimmers over the bright growing corn,
And in the woods the tender leaf is born.

On a hill at
Asolo, over-
looking the
Venetian
plain.

Noiselessly falls the blossom of the spring
'Mid peace like noontide : for not yet to sing
Comes the first bird that twitters in the brush.
It is Day's deepest peace,—the very hush
Of life,—a moment's pause, as when great waves
Of the deep sea, glide in deep-throated caves—
The rush of mighty waters, and their roar,
Sinks, sighing, lost upon the cavern's floor.

Distant bells. Again I hear the bells recurrent beat
 Now calling life to worship's ancient seat.
 Where I lie on the slope, the perfumed air
 Is rich with flow'ring laurels ; pale and fair
 Is the bloom bright'ning their leaves' lustrous green ;
 Nor in the spring are sweeter blossoms seen.
 I hear the hum of bees, a drowsy sound,
 A murmuring song above my chosen ground ;
 Again I hear, now far, now coming near,
 The bells' faint roar ; and, cloudlessly the clear,
 Opaline depth of the morn's spacious sky
 Gives fresh delight to an untroubled eye.
 From this Asolan height what outlook vast !
 Cities, farms, homes, and there too, of the Past,
 Old towers, and walls ; and yet more famous hills
 Where Petrarch rests : e'en yet his clear fame fills
 The place. The world goes there : Pilgrims of love :
 Great Poets : many names are writ above
 The floor oft paced by him.

Shelley. And Shelley came
 To yon peaked Euganean hill, his name
 The richer for his fluent fervid song
 Of the vast Lombard Plain.

What memories throng

And fill the Land. Its golden Autumn trees
 He saw far spread below like cloudless seas ;

Now 't is light-vested with the tender green
Of spring, and pale with million blossoms' sheen.
Where lies old Este, on yon hill's South base,
Lived Byron—there he watched great Nature's face ;
With Shelley there oft rode, or walked, or climbed
The heights, and brooding o'er thoughts freely rhymed,
Wedded his words to strong immortal verse,
Poured out his rapture or his rarer curse,
Drank deep of Nature's life, and, on her breast,
'Mid storied hills, oft calmed his heart's unrest.

Byron.

Afar I see the place of Shelley's song,
More famous still for a most ancient wrong :
'There Ecelin's sad victims, helpless, wept,
Maimed, wasted, starved, in loathsome prison kept ;
Old Padua ! founded ere the walls of Rome,
Begun by men whose early Trojan home
Was lost ; old Padua, built by Trojan hands
That battled long for Ilium's walls and lands.
'T is there ; near the clear Euganean heights ;
And there, where the awak'ning eastern lights
First dawn and fill the spacious morning sky,
Treviso spreads, yet pleasant for an eye
That ever looks, an ear that listens still
For Nature's freshest charm the soul to fill.
'T would be delight often to walk therein,

A joyous
city.

For pure quick streams rush living, foam, and win
Their way to meet and flow, and gladden all
The Land about, and turn a wheel, and fall,
With joyous sound ; go brightly gleaming down
To lower levels in the wallèd town.
Treviso is a place of ancient date
Rich with the story of man's changing state :
E'en in her soil was imaged Isis found,
Strange shapes from awful Egypt's sacred ground,
And later Gods of the bright race that came
Over the sea and gave the Land a name.

II.

O MEN innum'rous of forgotten days !
Strange was the Land, spacious and fair always !
Dim and afar off is that time ye came,
When first your boats fronted the billowy game
And sped across the seas whitened with foam
And sped to rest ye in a foreign home.

Ah ! what a land ye found ! what waters saw !
Deep ancient forests and dark island's shore,—
Volcanic isles that bore an older name,
Pyramid-shapes, smould'ring, or all aflame.
Long lost their name, and filled the crater's mouth,
Nor islands now, but blue mounts to the south ;
Far, vision-like, the mountains of a dream,
Of Myth, of that ancestral race, I deem,
That built the old port of the Amber Isles.
They came in their black boats, they drove black piles,
Leaving naught but the name of wealth once won,
A city they once raised, a course once run.

The Amber
Isles.

The Amber Isles ! the Amber Isles ! now seen

Earth-bound, and with the season's newest sheen.
 The filling earth hath choked each wat'ry way.
 Where ran deep sea-tides, and where ev'ry bay
 Then bore the black boats of the early race
 The plough now turns a furrow, and the place,
 In Autumn, sounds to the flail's rhythmic beat,
 And the brown earth is trod by peasant's feet.
 No more the galley's prow cuts the deep sea
 By yon hills' base ; nor do the waters, free,
 Beat in the port of the Amber Isles of old.
 Ages ago her merchants bought and sold,
 Ages ago Greek sailors often bore
 The amber of her Isles to a far shore.
 How cities fall ! how time doth pass ! men fail !
 Old is the page that holds the ancient tale.
 Spina's extinct, unseen ; sunk deep in dust
 Each witness of her life, her loves, her lust.
 Whether beyond yon mountain isles of blue
 And low on the wide Plain she rose to view,
 Or there, close by the Euganean hills,—
 Unknown the place her dust unnoted fills,
 Voiceless the spot where once she rose and fell :
 And yet one longs her tale to know and tell.

The Work of Her wrought and beaten gift, its worth all told,
 Daedalus. Delphos long kept, a tripod of red gold.

Two statues famed she had, one tin, one brass,
Made by a hand that none could then surpass ;
Colossal both, signs of a fearful day ;
Symbols of force that, with a wild dismay,
Once filled the Land, shook all her sun-bright isles,
Her earth upheaved, her sea drove back for miles.
O swift the meteors fell, lurid and dire
The sky shone with a Comet's dreadful fire ;
Then quaked the hills, with molten lava gleamed,
Burnt was the Land and all deserted seemed.
That shape of tin, that form of brass, were made
To tell what Spina and the world dismayed.

The earlier Venice sank not in the sea,
But deep into the earth eternally.
The earth spread far beyond her gates of old,
Spread far where anciently her waters rolled.
Wasted she was ; was squalid, poor and small
When Strabo wrote ; but traceless, lost to all,
When, later, Pliny sought to find the town.
What Goth and Hun had spared, to time went down
Unseen ; and all the world about her grave
Was changed, left far from the glad sea's live wave.

A lost city.

Flung by the thronging Po's resistless flood,
The stones, and sand, poured with the river's mud,

From Alp and valley, and from gorge and glen,
From the wide Lombard Plain, a waste place then,
Filled the Isles' wat'ry ways, and turbid rolled,
For leagues where the Lagoons spread far of old,
And rolled for leagues into the living sea ;
'T was for the future of humanity.

All traces of
it gone.

Far beyond Adria's wet and shining flats
Blinding with light, alive with shining gnats
The summer long, now, there is naught to save
Of the old town that stood beside the wave ;
No work of men to show its ancient place.
Like mists that ev'ry blowing breeze may chase,
Like a mirage, or like a phantom, lost ;
'T is gone, like slighter things ; like spray wind-tost
In empty air ; no vestige left ; nor bone,
Nor brass, nor clay, nor monumental stone.
From Paphlagonian shore, a far home,
From Ilium's plain, from Delphos and the foam
Of native seas, men brought all they could keep
From battle's ruin and the hungry deep.
The earth now folds them all in solemn rest ;
Oblivion fell where blessèd and unblest
Mingled their dust. Above them no sea moans.
Our mighty Mother music sad intones
For Life long ended, for the dead that lie—
It is the wind sunk to a weary sigh.

III.

PURPLE and blue the gracious Land is spread
To airy depths. The happy glance is led
Away as o'er the sea. For like the sea
The fair, far fields aripple seem to be
All green beneath the sky's immensity,
Seem waveless, flat 'neath its serenity.
Swift as a ruffling wind o'er water's breast
The colour comes, and goes, as shadows rest,
Or fleet away to the horizon's bound,
Where seems to lie the Poet's sacred ground,
Where float the blue isles to enraptured sight,
Where sleep the level clouds in mellow light.

It may be where now far Ferrara lies,
Unseen from here beneath more Southern skies,
Beyond yon hills coned like volcanic isles,
That earlier Venice rose to Fortune's smiles.
For twice four hundred years men marked her days,
Her name she gave to one of Po's thronged ways,

The earlier
Venice.

The Main-
land ravaged
by Attila.

Mistress she was of Adria's bright sea
Ages ere Venice rose for liberty ;
Long ages ere Altinum's people set
Foot on Torcello ; ere the Paduans, wet
With Adria's spray from the Destroyer flew ;
Ere Aquileia fell, her men withdrew,
Nor stopped their flight till sheltered near the sea :—
They fled to build i' the Isles' security.
Less cruel was the wave on Grado's sand
Than wilder Huns in the far-flaming land,
When all its strongest cities, burning, fell.
Of famèd Aquileia, tower and bell
Still last, and older sign of her proud state
In marble rare of vanished wall and gate.
From the Asolan hills to the sea's sand
Ravaged resistless Attila the land ;
From the strong Tagliamento's widened bed
To the quick Brenta's stream, the people fled.
Where the Musone runs, and brightly gleam
Clear Sile's noiseless waves smooth as a dream,
The green and gracious hills to silence left,
The wallèd towns were empty and bereft,—
The rank weed grew in each deserted street,
And famine stalked or death swept ev'ry seat.
A footless solitude the land was then,
So fierce the blast of War, that drove brave men

The ancient
Lagoons.

To seek a refuge on the scattered isles
 Where the Lagoons spread glist'ning miles and miles,
 Where the blue Adriatic beat the sand
 And pine forests made dark the marish land ;—
 A wild place, cut by shining water-ways ;
 At night impassable ; its tides' deep maze
 Untracked ; or free but to the fisher's bark,
 Free when dawn spread through all the breaking dark,
 When timid dawn, tremulous, gleaming dim,
 Its pale light cast o'er the horizon's rim.
 The stricken Land's sad people fled aghast
 From moat and wall to find a refuge fast
 Where waves were wild and waters wild were lone
 About Torcello's isle then all unknown ;
 They grew, they spread in numbers and in fame
 Where Venice is. The glory of her name
 Eclipsed all mem'ry of lost Spina's prime,—
 The older splendour of the older time.

O for a glimpse of Spina's proudest life.
 Unknown her gains in Peace, her loss in Strife,
 Yet it was often told, and held for true,
 Her men from the salt foam red amber drew,
 Red amber that e'en now in mummied hand,
 By Nilus and the Desert's waste of sand,
 In tombs Italic of her earliest day,

The Eridanus
 of the Early
 World.

Yet lies with dust and bones that fall away.
From Spina's mart and from rich Spina's port
Her Isle's red amber went to Priam's court ;
From her great river old, and vast, and deep,
So strong awake in rage, so smooth in sleep,
The Po,—great river now but mightier then,—
Called the Eridanus by Grecian men.

A River of
Elysium.

They said 't was fathomless, but that unseen
By mortal eye, deep-down, flowing between
Fresh flow'ry banks, it ran like shining light
Through fields Elysian ; that laurels bright
With blossoms pure and starred, sweet odours shed ;
That happy souls, released from woe, there led,
In leafy groves, a perfect life, and mild ;
Calm as the Lotus they reposed ; they smiled ;
Dear converse held ; and blissfully each soul
That river saw, watching its current roll ;—
An earthly river swollen, raging sped,
Yet it became Elysian for the dead.

A River of
Hell.

And others told that frightful, though unseen
By mortal eye, sunless, deep-down, between
Steep banks, it flowed in a perpetual night ;
All starless, dense, and black ; that a dim light
Was shed from Hell's great place of fiery woe,
In smoke and sooty fog all wrapped below.
This Stygian flood of awful, sulph'rous gloom,

Rushed swiftly by the place of dreadful doom,
And men said that while it, deep-down, unseen
Sped there, on high, i' the vast sky was seen
A river of great stars, of flowing light,
A lustrous stream all dazzling in the night,
That ever in mid space, silv'ry in air,
That stream flowed full and luminously there,
A heavenly high-way made for spirits sure
Where things celestial moved, and angels pure
Went to and fro ; and all this glitt'ring stream
I' the sky seemed most like some ethereal dream,
Whose course is traced in Heaven's solemn field ;
That far Eridanus at night revealed,
More soft than waters flow, yes, soft as light,
When light, like dawn, flushes the face of night ;
So flows Eridanus the enskied stream ;
But Earth's Eridanus doth wilder seem ;
And fiercer still, 't is said, with swirl and coil,
Hell's under-flood cuts deep and eats the soil
Upon its treach'rous banks that fall, and slide,
Like Tiber's yellow earth,—which sinks each side
Its brimming course, and fills the stream with clay,
Or mud, runs turbid to the sea away.—
The Furies, snaky-haired, with strong cold hands
Are there. Medusa, threat'ning, pallid stands,
Or walks distract, sleepless, and stern, and drear.

A River of
Heaven.

Medusa.

For sleep comes never in that world of fear.
O never yet upon that slimy bank
Fell gentle sleep, her dear head never sank
So low.

The Po. Insomnia in that darkened world,
With restless eyes and iron wings unfurled,
Lies with a tireless snake of many folds
Whose bite envenoms guilt, relentless holds
The wretched dead stirred from Lethean trance,
Adds to life's loss the sting of remembrance.
So of Eridanus, Hell's Stream that rolled
Unseen 'neath yonder Po, once, men were told.
Nilus, nor sacred Ganges, nor the vast,
The rolling Amazon, rushed never past
With tale so strange as thine, terrific Po,
Of old a river of a mightier flow.
Both wide and far it reached its many arms
To sink in peace where the sea ever charms,
In Adria's wave, by Spina's Amber Isles.
Behold them now, earth-bound for fruitful miles ;
Again their life recall, and see them still ;—
Cones, azure pyramids, blue mount or hill.
Volcanic flames, and dark'ning, blinding smoke,
By day, by night, from them o'er Spina broke,
Above her vast Lagoon, her sea's fresh flood,
Above her mighty river's banks of mud.

The Early
World.

The world about another aspect bore.
A richer world it was ; another shore
It had ; a watery world, then dense with trees.
All fragrant blew thro' column'd woods the breeze,
Balsamic odours rose delicious there,
And every woody smell made sweet the air ;
The winnowing wind's ærial hands
Unresting swept its sad mephitic lands.

Dark Horror had its own black breeding place
Beyond those Isles, in lake of obscure face.
To drink or pass its waters strange was death.
And odours strong and foul, pestif'rous breath,
From it arose. 'Twas streaked with glistening oil,
And bitumen-blotched ; with its strange water's coil
Clear naptha flowed. All black asleep, it broke
To ghastly foam but to the wind's wild stroke ;
More awful still, upheaved its heavy flood,
When hidden force stirred all the lake's black mud.

The Black
Lake.

Jason, with all his Argonauts, once sped
Past Spina's shore on conquest bent, but fled
In wild alarm on coming near the lake
Of death. For there the earth began to quake,
Came stench from the abhorrent sulph'rous flood,
And foulest air blew from thick marish mud,

Jason.

Far spread above the Amber Isle's dark crest,
And smoke, and flame menaced, and all oppressed.
Back to his boat fled Jason and his crew
As if from Phlegethon's hot wave they flew.
O'er all the land was dense obscuring cloud,
And noises strange were heard, a thund'ring loud
O'er all the region of the horrid lake
Then roused like some infernal force awake.

The Fall of
Phaethon.

By fulgent Myth the dreadful place is known.
There, daring all, bright Phaethon down was thrown,
Fell head-long from his burnished car of gold,
Fell where the Black Lake's flood then slowly rolled
Unblest, all sullen spread, while nature moaned,
And the rent Isle's volcano, awful, groaned.
Him the Heliades wept for like rain—
Three Sisters, and his own,—bereaved, in pain.
Old is the Myth that tells us of their tears
To Amber changed, themselves in those far years
To poplars turned ; and still the tree's light leaf
Incessant stirs as if to speak of grief.
This Myth I'm sure is not an empty tale,
It tells what woe befell yon Land ; how pale
Men grew with fear.

Plato,

Plato himself once sought
To say what meant the Myth with terror fraught.

Swift fantasy again would spread her wings,
Again renew that world of perished things.
Kept was the tale in Egypt's temples old,
To Solan by a Priest at Saïs told.

Nile's fine papyrus, temple-treasured, bore
The fearful Tale, how the sea's moving floor
Upbroke, uprose, in a far earlier age ;
In one night smote with awful, crushing rage.
Then famed Atlantis sunk, Earth lost its smile,
And, from the mainland wrenched, was made that Isle
Named the Sicilian, sunned, and fair, and rich ;
A Land shaped like its Mother, to bewitch.
These were the changes wrought when Time was young.
The changes wrought when Amber red was flung
On Spina's white shore, on her sea's low coast,
And the World of th' Eridanus did boast.

Was it famed flood of old Heroditus' ?
The place of which the learnèd still discuss,
Yet question if it be in the White North
Where spreads the foaming Baltic, casting forth
The yellow amber by Vistula's mouth ;
Or if it be our river of the South,—
The Po, where once sparkled the famous Isles,
Where still methinks they stretch o'er many miles.

O must we vainly ask where ? and when lost ?
What sea, what river's flood about them tost ?

Still the far Northern Ocean wildly raves,
And still from seething foam and falling waves
Flings yellow amber on its sandy shore
As in remotest time. But now, no more
From Adria's wave of blue it comes ; now none ;
Nor red, nor yellow as if from the sun
Its wave brings forth.

O when was amber born
From Adria's sea ? By whom was it first drawn ?
'Twas when Italia was mild Saturn's Land,
Called so before Eneas touched its strand,
Ere Trojan towers fell, or Helen wept ;
When Egypt's dead, like god's in sleep were kept,
When still renewed, the Pharaoh's ancient race,
In awe adored their living King's mild face.

Never was Adria's wave with amber fraught
Once Strabo said, and held the tale for naught.
In earlier age by other eyes 't was seen.
When the poor Adrian fisher went to glean
The sea's rich gift, and from its salty spray
Oft brought red amber to the light of day ;
Ere gold was known 't was brought to common light

And to the Age of Bronze gave rare delight,
And still in oldest tombs 't is found to grace
What yet remains of a long perished race.

A Land, tho' old, Italia then seemed new,
The Great West then to which the Trojan flew ;
To it the Asian and Egyptian came
And then was won the Amber Isle's lost name.
Its sons, in older time strange seas sailed o'er ;
They wooed the wind and bent the measured oar
Far coasts to reach beyond the roughened deep.
Its oldest name the oldest Myth doth keep.
Its life was great and rich in farthest eld,
The first in ancient time by Titans held.
'T was left abandoned to the countless dead.
Its race Pelasgic frightened from it fled.
For long years dreaded, desolate, 't was left ;
A Land convulsed, burnt bare, of all bereft.

Mythic
Italy.

Deserted.

The old Italic Land yet bloomed anew,
And men sought out the Place their fathers knew ;
They sought, from far, by fiercest famine urged
Their Land of old Renown by fire purged,
And found their destined home, Oracle-sped,
Ere the oaks of Dodona's wood turned red ;
The old, the rich, the fair Italian earth
Drew back its old Race to their Land of birth.

Repeopled.

IV.

Giorgione
and Castel-
franco.

TURN we to warmer life and to the place
That yet lifts its red walls 'mid shining space.

There work and fame of rare Giorgione draw
Pilgrims of Beauty. Deep religious awe
Is felt in Castelfranco's wallèd town.

'There his Madonna gazes sweetly down
Enthroned above the Monk and younger Knight ;
Benignant, calm—asleep the child in light—
She sheds dear peace upon the gazer there,
Restful and perfect as bland summer's air.
Whether the moonlight of mid August falls
Like an enchantment on Castello's walls,
Delicate dawn, or the calm mellow eve
'Their own old magic spell begin to weave,
'The place is fine to see.

There grew his life,
Sheltered and beautiful, in peace not strife.
Close to the castle's gate, by its tower tall,
His youth was spent ; by bridge and moat and wall,

By streams that run in green and glad'ning fields,
By placid pools like shining silver shields.
Midway between the mountains and the sea
His spacious level land delighted me.
There ling'ring, once, for all the year's best days,
I fondly saw what won Giorgione's gaze :
For Nature close to Castelfranco's gate,
And Art with all its chastened pomp and state
The Land about enriched for many years,—
A Century of peace ! till quick'ning fears
Of Cambray's League and Alvian's defeat
Made all Venetian ways roads of retreat ;
Darkened a brilliant life ; without defence
When 't was most proud with cultured opulence.
Then sudden flash of steel and noise of fight,
Oft roused the day and broke the peaceful night,
Stirred a heroic note 'mid pastoral charms
And grace idyllic, when the knight at arms
Kept watch and ward by gate and bridge and stream ;
Real life to Zorzo, but to us, a dream !

A Hundred
Years of
Peace.

When Tuzio's son,—a Master of the Lance—
Matteo, lost his life in battle's chance,
Giorgione painted him in armour bright,
Of lustrous steel : he is that saintly knight
Who proudly, firmly, splendid stands below

Giorgione's
Knight.

The mild Madonna 'gainst a golden glow,—
 A sky all peace divine, and yet so clear
 You'd say it is, not seems, all atmosphere.
 'T is Zorzo's finest art ; it gives a thrill
 To see the hero's grace, the painter's skill.
 How swift his life ! how quickly sped away !
 He knew sweet music's charm or sad or gay ;
 He knew deep love ; for it he dearly paid ;
 Yet glory crowned the man who died betrayed.
 How brief and fine his life ! how swiftly sped !
 Enticing charms to Court his rich youth led,
 Here, or at Queen Cornaro's Royal Seat,
 Where still the swift streams run with sparkling feet.
 In Parco's level meadows green and gay
 The Lady of the Land came oft to stay ;
 And there, or here, sat for Castello's son,
 And there, or here, his happy work was done.
 He painted Knightly valour's face with force ;
 Gaston de Foix slain in his vict'ry's course ;
 And it is said the Borgia sat for him.
 Bergamo keeps the portrait, nor yet dim
 With time, living the face appears,
 Intense the look after these many years.
 In the still eye a fascination burns,
 And coldest scorn, and cruelty that spurns
 All checks.

Borgia.

Behold the dreadful Borgia's mask !

His thin close lips set for a wicked task,
Firm to work out his will's bad fearless way.
The face has haunted me for many a day.
His pallid skin, straight nose, and straight dark hair,
His slight beard, tuft on lip ; his black cap's rare
Jewel and golden tassel deck his face—
The dread, incarnate, of his dreadful race.

Yet O Giorgione ! thy sure hand did trace
More than the Borgia's fatal, dang'rous grace :
Deep shade of trees, deep skies, and towers, and Knights, Romantic Art
And Shepherds, lovely women, all delights and Idyllic
Of country life, felt with sweet music's charm ; Life.
The dalliance of lovers, arm in arm,
In the green meadows, by the gleaming stream :—
The painted scene enchanting like a dream.
Not Keats, nor even Spenser, mild and sweet, Giorgione,
More beauty saw, nor felt more ardent heat, Keats and
For all delights of form and sense, yet free Spenser.
From common things and all vulgarity.
Before a treach'rous friend darkened thy day,
Before Cecilia fled from thee away,
Nothing there was to check thy passion's force,
And full, tho' brief, thy life went in its course.
Was it then thou didst write but write in vain

These light, these living words, untouched by pain?
“Hasten Cecilia: Come: Thy Giorgio waits
“For thee.” Words that no length of time abates;
They yet with love’s impatience seem to burn;
With it alive, again they seem to spurn
The empty hour that’s sped.

Alas! no more
Cecilia came to bless thee as before.

V.

OF older time is San Zenon's black tower.
It frowns yet tho' long past its evil hour.
Terrific once it was, or dark or fair
The sky of changing day. Raised high in air,
'T was for the Land a threat. Man's monstrous wrath
Worked vengeance there. Now narrow is the path
Up its green slope. There Ecelin's last son
With all his house was cruelly undone ;
Wife, children, all before his eyes abused,
Butchered ; himself, aghast, mangled and bruised,
A swift horse dragged far in wild panic-flight
Over the senseless fields ;—a fearful sight
Of blood and woe.

San Zenon
and Alberic's
Death.

Fair was the Land as now,
Spring sweetly came, and, richer still, the brow
Of summer bore her greenest, leafy crown,
And splendid Autumn flung his rich gifts down.
The years speed fast and full, and in the flow
Of Life who gives a thought to ancient woe ?

Cunizza of
Romano.

Beyond dark San Zenon's smooth grassy hill
See high Romano's tower, more famous still.
A Tyrant's fortress, Ecelin's safe lair,
And it was more ; the home of daughters fair ;
Palma, Sophia, and Cunizza famed :
Mildest she was of all her race, and named
By Dante as i' the Sphere of Paradise ;
A pleasant spirit ; in her time a prize ;
By Sin not darkened, nor the changing loves
Of her young days, when, freely as the doves
On am'rous flight, she gave all that she had
To Venus. Long the life she lived. Tho' sad,
Tho' evil was her age, some good it kept.
Last of her race, how long she now hath slept !

VI.

O PLENITUDE of life of other days !
Six hundred years o'er rich Trevisian ways
Have gone since Tuscan Dante's saddened eyes
Saw the green hills that near Bassano rise,
His exile's step led even to yon place
Where rare Cunizza, of the winning face,
Born in the shelter of Romano's tower,
Grew sweet and strong to meet its fatal hour.
Her refulgent spirit i' the Shining Sphere
Appeared to Dante's dazzled eyes. And dear
To him the much loved Lady of past days.
She in her time had won men's fondest gaze.
Her speech was proudly sweet in Paradise.
Her spirit light, i' the Poet's solemn eyes
Found grace. No sign of shame was on her brow.
She to him there said : " Be indulgent thou,
" Be gracious thou to me."

Dante at
Cunizza's
Birthplace.

He knew her life.
She many men had known, to five been wife.

She speaks to
Dante in
Paradise.

With light disdain, smiling, she said : “ My place
“ So high in Heaven, it may be, to the race
“ Of common folk most strange will seem. Vex not
“ My mind with aught of my past earthly lot,
“ Nor question why I hold my present state ;
“ Born was I for sweet human love, not hate ;
“ By natal star compelled, by Venus led
“ From birth to death.” So rare Cunizza said.

The Poet of all Beauteous Rectitude,
Who amongst men was forced to solitude,
Was swerveless, tender, matchless, just of mind,
Bold to brand sin, yet to Cunizza kind.

Browning's
“ Palma.”

She is that tranquil woman fond and fair
Whom Browning “ Palma ” calls ; that spirit rare
Who to her love unfolds, in beauty glows
As to the sun a bud of Summer's rose.
In Youth her lips gave back a Poet's kiss.
Sordello led her to supremest bliss,—
Sordello, the gay castle Court's best man ;
For him the thrill of love in her began.
The Lady with Sordello fled away.
The tale of passion's force lasts to our day.
It brightens still the dullest dusty page
Of Guelf's and Ghib'lin's all unsparing rage.

Sordello's
Cunizza.

And here that tale I'll tell. Nor is that all
Of famed Cunizza's life I would recall.
Bride of Verona's Lord, Count Boniface,
Not long she stayed his wife. Sordello's grace
Or art beguiled the lonely Lady's mind,
Too much alone, by Castle wall confined.

But two years married the young wife to list
The poet's wooing voice not often missed
His song. A wooing song Sordello sung.
Long lost the song of his enchanting tongue.
'T was love's own voice the rapt Cunizza heard ;
For ever new its winged and burning word.

Sordello, minstrel-guest, was left to charm
Away the tedious hours—in that what harm?—
When—Ghib'lin-sway to break—the rash young Count
In haste for far Ferrara quick did mount,
With Este's Prince rode fast, a fierce assault
On Este's foe to make ;—the hot time's fault
That men to battle oft would madly go,
By peace made restless, glad to strike a blow.
Of Boniface there 's much to leave untold ;
A Guelf, Verona oft he sought to hold ;
Verona's Count there long his house stood fast ;
He often ruled the town, oft was outcast

By the Montecchi's men whom Ecelin led,
Ambitious to become Verona's head.
When Boniface allied with Este's Lord
Went forth to win Ferrara with his sword,
Was lured to treat for peace within the place,
For him deep Ecelin contrived disgrace—
He drew his sister back, the Count's own wife ;
So he outraged the Count, renewed the strife
To hold, or lose, all fair Verona town.
Rash Boniface entrapped, enraged, put down,
Betrayed, one year a prisoner was kept
Within Ferrara's gates ; Cunizza slept
In peace, fled to her brother's own domain,
At his hest by Sordello brought again.

What youth's quick sense is locked in walls of ice ?
Not long Sordello distant kept, precise,
Nor vainly spoke, assiduous to the bride
Who first had won, then kept him to her side.
Man's fervid passion swiftly then, as now,
Warm kisses gave and won for lip and brow ;
Its sense was sudden, love imperative ;
Believe it well to know what love can give,
What kiss Sordello took, what kiss he gave,
What bliss of love was his before the grave.
How young ! how mad ! how blest these lovers were !

Verona's lovers! They for naught did care
Save love's command. Exultingly they flew.
But once life's goblet foams, but once, they knew,
But once, deliciously, the lovers burn,—
Eager for rapturous love all life they spurn.

They sped Verona way, or far beyond
Where Ecelin was strong, these lovers fond ;
They flew to pass the Brenta's rush and flow,
To San Zenon, or to green Romano,
Or to Asolo's fortress built so high,
So strong, its walls still stand close to the sky!
Ah who would not both follow with delight
From bonds that hold by dull day or dead night,
In sky-pure Italy, to that famed town
Verona old ; or where the Alps flow down
In graceful lines that fall in level rest,
Beyond grim walls to the green hills' smooth crest,
Where wide the smiling landscape lustrous lies ?
What hath Italia greener for men's eyes ?
With both in old Verona to abide
If but to see what time and ruin hide
Were well indeed. Of wood was built the town,
But red-brick church and palace new looked down
Upon the slighter walls. There grandly stood
Triumphant art of Rome o'er homes of wood,—

Stupendous structures of her former day,
They told of Roman force long passed away,
Enduring walls, proportioned all so well,
And meant to last if meaner buildings fell.
There stood the Amphitheatre unharmed,
With much to show the town that Cæsar charmed—
The marble city of his older name,
Illustrious, of most poetic fame.

Verona of Cunizza's time was grim,
A tower'd town with narrow streets, and dim,
Stayed she long with Sordello? Who can say?
There is a tale that one unlucky day
His love for Ecelin's sister soon made known,
And spied, provoked rebuke, when he alone
By night, once stole to her. The tale as told
Were fatal to a poet's page—how bold
Sordello was by Ecelin surprised—
Cunizza too—most kindly was advised
To go and sin no more—forgiven go.
No man was ever more confounded so;
Nor more with her was bold Sordello housed;
Both threatened by dark Ecelin aroused;
His wrath unchecked to one could fatal prove,
To both most dang'rous dared they show their love.
False is the tale that Ecelin sought and killed

Sordello. But his deep'ning ire fast filled
With fear Cunizza's heart ; for Ecelin
Terrific was e'en to his nearest kin.
Yet was Cunizza dear and close to him,
A smile of love to features worn and grim.

Cunizza lived for other days. When old
A will she made that her last thought doth hold.
Shaken by grief, firm-minded, not undone,
She in her exile lived—a burnt-out sun—
In ashen coldness sank ; or like a moon,
Resplendent once, but changing oft and soon,
Through all its phases run, now dimmed or veiled
With vapours dull ;—so rare Cunizza failed.
Of her in age there's yet this dearest trace,—
When old she saw child Dante's earnest face ;
When old she touched young Dante's thoughtful brow ;
She to the list'ning boy, intent, told how
Great was dread Ecelin's power, how great his fall ;
Or told, at her strong kinsman's house, of all
That once her heart allured, her mind impressed ;
Or she sat silent, half her thoughts but guessed ;
In peace ; with sorrows worn, and solemnized ;
Her loves far off and now but faintly prized.
She lived withdrawn, from her own land remote,
But sought no Convent's cell to sit, and dote

The aged
Princess of
Romano.

In penitential tears, mourning her sins,
 The thing most women do when age begins.
 Cunizza calmed, looked back without distress
 To all her wild quick years of storm and stress ;
 Retrospection. Looked back to her proud days ; her thrilling joys ;
 Passions imperious ;—all now like toys
 Of life,—the slight swift things of changing days,
 The slight swift things that go, for nothing stays.
 She 'scaped the wrath that wrought Romano's woe,
 To Florence from the Trevisàn did go.
 At Florence. When her strong brothers fell, she fled, and ground
 Safer for her, a welcome too, she found
 At her famed kinsman Cavalcante's hand,—
 Father of Dante's poet friend,—that grand,
 Keen Guido, scorner of the crowd, who wrote
 The abstruse sonnet ; many a gentle note
 And verse of purest thought, tenderly sweet
 In praise of love and for his lady meet.

At Cavalcante's house Cunizza signed
 A testament to free her slaves. With mind
 Her last
 Retreat. Intact and clear, freedom she gave all men
 Bound to Romano's soil, save those who,—then
 Known dastards all,—at San Zenon, betrayed
 Her brother. She a curse invoked and said
 Fervently : May ten thousand devils all

The Germans seize who caused Alberic's fall.
Nor this the last of firm Cunizza known.
Beyond small Prato to this day is shown
A castle strong which once the valley held,
And there Cunizza once again beheld
Her mother's home as 't was in days of yore ;
And there of much despoiled, the Lady saw
Her final years. With mind unfaltering,
Invincible, determined she to bring
Her claims to light ; she claimed the confiscated
Lands of her house,—lands of her tragic-fated,
All-grasping brothers, whom the Guelfs down-pulled,
Destroyed, swept from existence and annulled.
Enough, you'd say, on one sad woman's head,
Enough of woe, so reft of close kindred,
To break her heart, and break the firmest mind.
E'en then by extreme age and grief confined,
Cunizza to the last was resolute.
For what was hers to give she was not mute.
Muzza, her castle i' the Trevisàn
She willed unto her cousin, whence began
Deep woe of murder foul ; most sinister
The name it gave to her retreat. In her
Last days there horror rose. On Dante's page
Is told how punished was a brother's rage ;
But not how close was fearful fratricide

Her Will.

To sad Cunizza's life there terrified.
Dark Tragedy, relentless still, pursued
Cunizza to the tomb. She must have rued
The day that brought her once to see again
Most cureless wrong arise to give her pain,
To throw o'er her its deep, oppressive shade
E'en i' the place where, a child, her mother played.
Smitten so oft by shock of sudden death,
Found she oblivion ere her latest breath?

An Invoca-
tion to
Cunizza.

O woman heart at last of all bereft,
Whether for thee Lethean peace was left,
Who knows? Or if, in richest memory,
Transfigured were the troublous times gone by?
Each day thy mind renewed, no crumpled page
Of dead effacèd things, living, in age,
Was bright; thy eye was clear; thy soul was pure;
Corruptless, it was given to endure.
O rarest nature, made like metal fine,
Which bent, not broke, when fortune proved malign.

Immortal woman and compassionate!
A Pietà! thou knew'st the force of fate;
Mother of Sorrow didst bow o'er thy dead,
How oft! How oft was bowed thy dearest head!
Chastened thou wast; by suff'ring sanctified;

Not crushed ; nor e'er abased thy woman's pride ;—
A deathless thing, and queenly ; thy life's crown.

For the transgressions of thy youth no frown
Have I. Love won thee, or strong Passion urged ;
Or true Love triumphed, or deep suff'ring purged.
Storms pass, far driven, are swept clean away.
So are life's tumults ; they have their brief day ;
They are not to endure ; like clouds they are,
Black, horrid, or transfigurèd, that bar
Eternal Heaven ; threat'ning the piled rack
Drives on, or splendid mounts, traceless its track
In skyey space ; it will not last ; it goes ;
Where most of ill it wrought there comes repose.

At Cerbaïa, by its rushing stream
Cunizza's many years seemed like a dream.
From thence, in youth, her Tuscan mother came,
Dark Adelaide of lust'rous, sinister fame.
Horrid Vision and prophetic sight
Gave to her fulgent eye a tragic light,
Shadowed her face from which the smile had fled,
Like one, who, ever to all joy is dead.
She told her son's sad end, that he should die
At San Zenon, dishonoured there would lie—
At San Zenon, where now a peaceful bell
Clangs oft, clangs last the dying day's farewell.

Adelaide.

Her
Prophecy.

The solemn Mother of a doomèd race,
She with the pallid, Alliberti face,
Made whiter by her watch of starry night,
And whiter still by that terrific sight
Seen twice in the deep, slumb'rous, silent night,
Seen as one sees by light'ning's vivid light.
She lay in sultry sleep stirring, oppressed ;
She dazzled woke, but woke undone, unblest ;
She stirred, loosed from a Ravisher's embrace,
To see the First Seducer's burning face—
Satan himself, fulg'rous, in triumph raised.

Satan. Twice came the Vision in the quiet night,
Twice the still darkness was made flaming bright,
Twice she bore Satan on her dazzling breast,
Twice was by Horror ravished and oppressed.

Last Adelaide, shuddering heard, appalled and dazed,
In stifling, burning, atmosphere, amazed :
“ Two sons thou shalt bring forth from my embrace
“ Both Killing, Wasting, Scourges of their race.”
Terrific Lust and Murder's Sire, in air
Aflame, left Adelaide like Medusa there.
She, proudly mute, until her latest hour
The secret kept of dread Infernal power.

O strangely pale she seemed ; her smould'ring glance
Profound and slow, had oft foreseen mischance.
Subtle of thought she was, in magic versed.
Herself, her family, ambition-cursed.
She shaped and led her husband's restless mind,
And dreamed the whole Trevisian Land to bind ;
Told when on prey to swoop, and when to hide,
When War to make, and when, in Peace, abide.
The key of Italy she thought to keep
If not its crown, and pondered oft, and deep,
To ope or shut the Kaiser's gate, to hold,
Or give the way, won by her house of old.

Measureless thoughts were hers, and questions dark
She sent into the deep of night ; did mark
Portentous signs ; 't was thought she could evoke
The dead ! Unmoved had listened while they spoke !
Star-led, she knew each far celestial sign ;
She watched her planet's rise, saw it decline.
Severe, supreme, unbending, walked in pride ;
So read dark fate that Hope forever died
From out her heart. With Woe and Fear aghast,
She saw Romano's house should fail at last,
Accursèd sink in pain and blood ; unwept ;
And leave a blackened name—forever kept.

A watcher
of the
Stars.

Mother and
Daughter.

'T is strange that the drear Adelaide's dark race
Should bear Cunizza's loving, woman-grace,
Strange that Cunizza—Adelaide, should be
Contrasted so in personality ;
Both living types of woman's brain and sex :
One love controlled, naught of the world she recks ;
The other thought, and dared, all life to spurn
That yields not to her worldly will's proud turn.

VII.

FROM Brenta's font to far Rialto's isle
 The fruitful Land spreads mile by fruitful mile ;
 From Brenta's stream to wide Piave's bed,
 Gaunt Alberic, or Ecelin, was head
 Of all who filled the Land, or gave a name
 To castle-keep, or place of greater fame.
 With growing might, or craft, they strove to hold,
 Annul, or kill, the Four,—great Lords of old,
 Each in his own domain,—their City's pride
 Or woe—who dark Romano's force defied ;
 San Piero and Camino ; Boniface,
 With Este ; all of high illustrious race.
 None felt secure till Ecelin lay dead ;
 Not one but watched the 'Two with rising dread ;
 Alberic's guile, fierce Ecelin's great greed,
 As oft he stirred the Land his pride to feed.
 Tho' black as cub of lust and pitchy night,
 A fiend in act, abhorrent to men's sight
 Men followed where he led : bold wit and will

Ecelin of
 Romano.

A Monk's
Dream of
Ecelin.

Were his : quick to conceive and work all ill ;
The agent, it was thought, of God's own wrath :
'T was so believed. With blood he drenched his path.
'T was said, and so the legend runs, a Monk,
In vision, or in dreamy sleep, deep sunk,
Saw the Lord Christ, and th' Angel dark of woe,
To whom Christ cried " The wicked thrive below ;
" Who shall avenge me of these dreadful men ? "
(Lombard, Trevisian, most were evil then.)
The angel dark of aspect sad and weird
Said, turning : " There, behold, by all souls feared
" Dark Ecelin, born for his country's woe ;
" On his swart face a strangely lurid glow ;
" To him be given the avenging sword
" To drive to prison, stake, or flame, or cord,
" Thousands who, helpless, fall beneath his sway."
God punished so, 't was thought in that far day.
Vicar of Wrath, the Ghib'lin's strongest hope,
Against him rose the Lombard League. The Pope
Proclaimed a Holy War. Men rose that day
Like Red Cross Knights to break a cursèd sway.
Fierce Ecelin, dauntless, to rich Brescia flew,
Surprised the town and many victims slew.
He aimed to strike Milan, enter her gate,
But in swift De La Tor he met his fate.
Great Captains of the League his might withstood.

His way was blocked : at length at bay he stood.
By Adda's bridge he fought, there met defeat—
His last—made desperate, crippled in his feet.
“ Cassano ! ” sudden cried he. Like a knell
To him the name was, uttered ere he fell.
Nor did he speak again, worn out, down-cast ;
All care repulsed ; all bloody there and ghaſt ;
For days refused to eat ; and from his wound
Tore off the bands to bleed afreſh unbound,
Nor ever raised his eyes, but, dumb to fate,
He ſilent lay and ſcorned his victor's hate.
So trapped, hemmed in, ſo balked on ev'ry ſide
At Soncino, like a wild beaſt, he died.

His laſt hour.

Then roſe the Land with joy : in jubilee
The bells of ev'ry Church from Mount to Sea
Were rung aloud. The ſounding melody
Shook the free air ; with joy ſtirred Italy.
White Milan's iron tongues beat wildly glad,
And Venice, many voicèd, as if mad,
From her high towers ſent in revelry
Her feſtive notes aſſying merrily.
Metal on metal clashed, and loud around,
Aroſe and fell the clanging, joyful ſound.
The Earth itſelf from Wrong ſeemed free at laſt

The joy of
Italy.

Ecelin and
the Emperor.

When wolfish Ecelin lay still and ghast,
The bells were rung all day, and when night came
The Land about was weird with leaping flame.
The bells resounding, fires blazing bright
Sped Ecelin's soul on its hidden flight.
Yet wouldst thou know ferocious Ecelin
When free from hate, he favour once did win?
It was a day when Friedrich was at rest,—
An idle day for chace, or sport, or jest.
He knew to please a knight and what was best
In Art, and song, and work. The Soldan's guest,
He learned the Arab's choicest skill and craft;
Sicilian song; and bore the southern graft
The Hauenstauffen stock have proudly worn.
In him the Troubadour's light grace was born.
He with his knights and Ecelin once stood,
Unbent from thought, and in a happy mood:
"Let us," he said, "compare our dearest blades."
His own was curious with lights and shades,
Most strangely wrought, a thing of greatest price.
Said Ecelin "'T is rare, of brave device;
"But Sire, I have a plainer blade to draw,
"Yet good." Out-flashed his sword all eyes before.
Six hundred glitt'ring blades i' the instant there
Were drawn. It was a sight to see most rare.

As one man the six hundred armèd knights
Drew each his blade, well proved in famous fights.
“ ’Hold ! the best sword is yours,” the Emp’ror said,
And with a smile he bent his gracious head.

VIII.

Ecelin
and the
Beggars.

AT others' cost had Ecelin his jest.
The beggars of the town he once addressed
With kindly speech ; he bade them all be gay ;
For all, he said, upon a certain day
Must come within his castle's spacious court
For food and clothes and honest festal sport.
The day announced, from far and near quick came
A host, all beggars, blind, or halt, or lame ;
Of ev'ry age and shape ; in rags ; half clad ;
Upon their backs, it seemed, was all they had.
As at Jerusalem, by David's Gate,
A row of Lepers stand, or squat and wait,
And hoarsely cry, and shake their empty plates,
So some appeared among their sounder mates.
A lot more strange and bad was never seen ;
Blar-eyed and bruised, or swollen, fat or lean ;
They shuffled, hobbled ; all that motley crowd ;
They pushed and squeezed ; they coughed and sneezed
aloud
Through Ecelin's open gate.

And some were meek,
And all seemed poor and came some good to seek.
Others were there most vile and gross, like hogs.
For once these beggars came, fearless of dogs.
Tables were spread with all that they could bear,
With wine to pour, and meat to take and tear.
Each pauper sat him down his drink to swill,
Ravenous gorge, and take of all his fill,
While Ecelin looked on from high above :
He saw them feed, and felt the gentle love
A hawk may feel ere he swoops swiftly down.
The feast then done, new clothes were brought, a gown,
Or coat for each, and something more to hide
All nakedness.

The order came to slide
The bolts, and quick was closed the palace gate.
Loudly they all mourned their most piteous state,
To doff their old rags forced by threats or blows ;
Of all despoiled, they stood in naked rows.
But Ecelin's men to each one gave a suit.
The cast off rags they searched from cap to boot.
To Ecelin came coin, enough, and more
The Feast to pay plus—all the wretches wore.
Some wept or howled to see their rags laid by,
With woe they rocked to see their rags heaped high.

The gate was opened ; penniless they went ;
Each beggar clad in clothes without a rent.
The honest gave loud thanks, with wine were glad,
But all the false ones cried ; were dumb ; or mad ;
Miser, and Jew, and Thief, and Sneak for once
Knew Satan's squeeze, and felt he was no dunce.

IX.

WOULDST see the Tyrant's hill?—it surges there,
Not very high in the crystalline air.
Its great tower overlooks a gladsome scene,
Its grassy knoll seems fresh and ever green.
Afar from it you see the Brenta glide,
And brown Bassano by the river-side.
The hills sweep joyously and far away,
And ev'ry slope lies warm to the bright day.
Soft is the pure and everlasting air,
Delicious to the sense ; sunny and fair
The broad land smiles, its fields and hills kept green
By fresh and frequent streams that flow unseen.
And none of sweeter sound or clearer wave
Than thine, Musone, the warm foot doth lave.
Many a time to music of thy flow,
Many a time while list'ning to thy slow
Soft current slipping o'er its pebbly bed
A light and whisp'ring sound my step hath led
To follow thee.

Romano
seen from
Asolo.

The Musone
in May.

Banks greener, or a stream
More limpid, song hath never praised. The gleam
Of thy clear face shines ever to the sun,
Or swift or slow thy yearly race to run ;
With murm'ring music beneath the May Moon,
Not over loud with rain, drowsy thy tune,
Silv'ry thy note, all gaily sparkling there
'Mid hills upraisèd to the delicate air.
Such pleasant lisp'ng sound, like playful talk,
I've heard from thee in my meand'ring walk ;
And then, a richer note,—the nightingale's—
I've heard, at even-time, in dusky dales,
Led by thy banks unto a leafy glade
Far from the step of boy or shepherd maid ;
Passionate melody, and all the rush
Of new-born joy, rapture amid the hush
Of earth and sky bare to the Moon of May
Melting, suffusing all the twilight grey.
Entrancing poured the lustrous flood. Full well
Its charm I felt. O heavenly it fell
Upon the sense like the sea's warmest wave
And silent bliss to all my being gave.

The Rising
Moon.

In far off paths, beneath the rising Moon,
My ling'ring step was late, but all too soon
Up the steep, shadowed, long Asolan hill

Sombre with tufted trees. Asleep or still
Was life. Yet the red flame of a lone shrine, —
Where jessamine and clematis entwine,—
Burned bright, the peasant's faithful star from birth
To death set in the darkness of the earth.
The elder-bushes flowering, creamy-white,
Motionless were like pale flakes of moonlight,
Th' acacia's blossom sweetened the soft air ;
Splendid the May Moon's herald star burned there
Above the hill, rising in the clear sky,
Lustrous and mild ; and not a cloud passed by,
No not a cloud to darken in its flight,
The vast, serene, and wide-embracing night.
Floods from the infinite, the unseen life,
Touched soul and sense. Stilled was the old sad strife
Of seen,—unseen ; all being seemed deep fused,—
Nature's and man's ; illumined and suffused
With the moon-flood of limitless pure light ;
The May moon inundating the whole night,
The full May moon above the dark hill-side,
The rose red moon of May rising to glide
O'er sleeping earth ; the Queen of starry space,
A world entrancing with her lustrous face ;
The soul of Love she seemed to shed on us,
In stillness deep, supreme, mysterious.

A night of
May.

The Full
Moon.

X.

BY the Musone in far other days
 Strange was the chance, and hard, that did amaze,
 And stir the Land when from Romano's lair
 Ecelin's wife, Cecilia, trusting there
 Came forth.

Cecilia.
 The Land's Great Lady, of fair name,
 Of rich estate, proud and secure, she came
 From out her castle all alone, tho' won
 By craft from young San Pier, who—but begun
 His suit,—saw his bold rival quickly take
 The heiress, famed for her great riches' sake.
 Festive she rode by the green river-side,
 And far she left her home and gaily hied
 On Padua-way. By San Andrea,—to rest
 She stopped awhile; beguiled and even prest
 By young San Pier, who, suddenly appeared.
 His court he paid to make himself endeared—
 Bold court he paid to Ecelin's young wife,
 Nor recked that he should stir the Land to strife,
 As he, by force, bent to his purposed will

Romano's Lady.

Desperate and ill

The act, lustful the love, and deep the hate
That brought deep woe to the bride's trusting state,
When, the next day, with scorn, to Ecelin
Back she was sent stained by compulsèd sin.
Romano's Lord refused his injured bride,
And hard and grim, rejected her; abide
Her sight he would not. She a better fate
Found with the years—she found a better mate,
But all the Land was roused by rival's rage,
And blood of all the best burned war to wage.
For San Pier men arose to take the field,
For Ecelin men fought, nor one would yield
While strong Bassano's Lord kept vengeful way
Or with rich Padua bold San Pier was gay.
And still by the Musone's grassy rim
Is told the tale of Long Ago; and dim
Doth seem the life lived there: yet 't was so strong,
It hath its place in story and in song.
The stream flows on, its wave is seldom still,
(Altho' in drouth it shrinks, nor bed doth fill),
But, ever as it goes, its banks keep green;
Amid its hills right joyously 't is seen.
Thou art a spirit, O Musone mine;
watch thy waters run and interwine.

INTERLUDE.

AS out of mist the island bells resound
Unseen, both faint and sweet from hidden ground,
As out of mist, the sun, a paler light
Casts down, and only seems a phantom bright
In air, a shining, looming, failing sphere,
Both weird and dim in morning's atmosphere ;—
Delight it gives to hear the softened notes,
To see the sun, as in a dream one floats :
So faint, unseen, the life of distant years,
So from the Past an ancient day appears.

XI.

THERE is a placid stream that gently flows,
Smoothly it glides along, silent it goes,
And slow, save when at flood with rain or snow,
It swells and foams and seems in rage to go.
The *Musolente*—yet the name doth tell
How the stream quiet thro' the quiet dell,
Thro' wood and field all calmly, gently flows,
Nor breaks its bank as slow its water goes.
There—on a day when hoary Rome was great,
With all her Legions strong her widened state
To keep—by the slow river's bank once spread
A hamlet whence a Vet'ran came. He, dead,
A legacy there left to deck the place
Each year where low he lay in death's embrace,
His tomb to deck with rose and violet,
To offer food as well, nor him forget
In any way, tho' all unseen, and sped.
Gone is the stone of him whose honour'd head
Once rested there ; his name—not there to see—

The Muso-
lente.

Vettonius was called. Viewless to thee
His dust : his place unknown—his language—dead,
And other lives and days above his head
Have swiftly swept.

And green the river's bank,
And green the hills whereon the Vet'ran sank.
He thought to keep his tomb forever fresh
With flowers, with roses, with violet's mesh.
In vain his wish prolonged amid his hills
To sleep adorned in spite of all life's ills.
The flowers come, and go, renewed and fair,
The dead dispersed—Oh to what unknown air ?
But rose and violet they come again,
They bloom for us—but for the dead in vain.
Dear dead ! Do ye arise where ye have slept
Unseen, and all forgot, in darkness kept,
Earth-won ? Oh dreamless dust in voiceless rest
Of funeral urn, of tomb, of grave, as best
It seemed to rev'rent hands, and pious hearts
To mark the spot where life from death departs,
What hope ? Shall we arise where we have slept
Unseen, and all forgot ? Our bones unkept,
Our ashes all dispersed ! Yet Faith doth say
That we shall rise for an eternal day.
Faithless !—There's naught to tell we have more place
Than smile or frown that fleets o'er nature's face.

XII.

GRIMLY the *Rocca*¹ old lifts its strange form
High over Asolo. How oft to storm,
To time, to war alike a signal prey,
Yet strong to last for many a coming day.
A mystery. Its walls of age unknown.
An awful fortress. Without e'en a stone
To tell its date, or what race built up there.
It hath nine sides and but one gate. 'T is bare,
And now 't is empty. There is naught to tell
Who laid its stones in even strength so well,—
At Rome's command? or by more ancient word
Bid rise, long ere the Latin's speech was heard?
But stay your step where well it crowns the hill.
Strange signs you'll see upon its stones; for still
E'en now mysterious marks you there may find
By time made faint, or by the biting wind.
Be they the marks of languages long sped?
Etruscan, or Euganean, long dead?

The Rocca.

¹ Ancient fortress of stone.

Uncertain still is Learning's latest word,
 What men first held, or whose the speech first heard
 Within the *Rocca's* high imperious wall ;
 Kept is the *Rocca's* secret from us all.
 Under the Saracenic arch yourself
 May see the Carrarese's wheel. The Guelf
 Effaced the Ghib'lin's white heraldic sign,
 Grim Ecelin's white ostrich,—crest malign
 Of strong Bassano's Lord, whose victims wept,
 Wasted in anguish lone, in darkness kept.
 See, even yet, below the tower's base,
 The horror deep of all that sunless place.
 Climb there at break of day, or when the sun
 With pomp of trailing cloud sets all in one
 Far-burning glory,—a great splendid show ;
 When placid Eve comes ere the after-glow,
 Or with the after-glow to light your feet,
 There 's beauty at all hours your eyes to greet.
 Whether the Plain lies dark beneath the sky,
 Sun-smitten brightens, or with clouds that fly
 Changes ; and like a face hath smile, or frown ;
 Whether all grey or azure at sun-down,
 Or mid-loon, melting into the far deep—
 The soundless distance, soundless and asleep
 At night, by darkness hid, its life unseen ;
 'T is like a Presence felt, restful between

The Venetian
 Plain from
 the Rocca.

'The Alps and the far, the pale Apennines ;
 Not homeless to its furthest confines,
 Nor sad, like that place spacious as the sea
 That spreads for miles and miles without a tree,
 For many a league of green and golden grass
 Stretches where Rome's worn pilgrims ever pass ;—
 But garden-like, laid in far stretching lines
 And rich with work that all our life refines.
 Campagna, by Rome's monumental race
 Once filled with life, is now a mournful place :
 There ruins vast out-watch the Century's dust,
 And sad lie all the wrecks of human trust.
 Not so, where, vaster, the Trevisian plain
 Won jocund name of Love's own bright domain.
 The Land of Joyous Love, 't was often called.
 Smiling and rich, it was but rarely pall'd
 By woe funerëal. For, ever life
 Prevailed, though long was fratricidal strife,
 And ever Death anew struck all the Land
 From these hills to the Adriatic's sand ;—
 From Brenta's stream to swift Piave's known
 As the Trevisian March.

A joyous
 land.

La Marca
 Gioiosa e
 Amorosa.

Nor yet is flown
 Its fair and open life, blissful and mild.
 Tho' city fought with city, men were wild
 With wrath, yet brief was war, like tempest brief ;

La Danza
Trivigiana.

It swept the Land, laid life low like a leaf ;
As quick life richly rose to smile again,
As quick restored was Love's own festive reign.
Its maidens famed of old for loving-art,
And famous e'en for wit as well as heart,
For beauty, and all women's winning ways,—
For blithesome hearts renowned from ancient days ;
When the 'Trevisian Dance was widely known,
And all the jocund city's trumpets blown
From Love's thronged Castle, and its maidens all
Close fluttered to defend its leaguered wall.
Old is the book that tells the well known tale
How missiles flew from ladies red or pale,
How Padua's youth there stood in jealous rage
To see St. Mark's best men win vict'ry's gage,
In lists of joy there rival's flag tore down
And made Treviso and her guests to frown ;
What war up-sprung, and how rich Padua paid,
And left the field to Venice undismayed.

XIII.

WHEN in Alcamo's sun-bright isle arose
Italian song, 't was then, where Sile flows,
Camino's daughter won a poet's fame.
Her life was joyous, Gaia was her name.
Treviso's Lady, rose she there to crown
Goito's son fresh in his young renown?
A poet he; if Legend's counted true,
Also a Prince; his home where Mincius blue
Feeds her two liliated lakes, and Mantua lies,
A liliated town fair set between twin skies.
Their names, be sure, a brilliant day recall,
And force and beauty, both, from Death's dark pall
Deliver; lift from all their time's disgrace
Something that once made bright each living face.
Of later days and fame there's much to reap
The Land o'erlooking, while at rest where steep
Asolan hills, green from bare crest to plain
Let see how Piave i' the snow or rain
Speeds on its whitened way, a raging flood.
Its force the Fra Gioconda's art withstood,

Gaia of
Treviso.

Fra Gio-
conda.

And his the plan that stayed War's rush and flow,
His wall's defence withstood the German's blow ;
Treviso, St. Mark's mainland city held,
When Brescia and Verona—world-beheld—
Vicenza, Padua yielded fearing all ;—
To League of King, Pope, Emperor did fall.
Well proved the worth of gay Treviso's walls,
The first raised up against strange cannon balls ;
Their strength and art due to Verona's son
When famed Gioconda was for Venice won.

His Work.

Called by the Pope to fill Bramante's place,
When old, he saw fine Raphael's youthful face.
Empowered to tell the Painter all he knew,
For this, and more the Pope that Friar drew
From Venice

With
Raphael.

Travelled, famous was the monk.
His life was studious, and never sunk
In cloistered sloth. A Bridge across the Seine
He built, and Palaces raised not in vain.

He was a scholar ; books to him were dear ;
The dark things in Vitruvius he made clear :
Thousands of stones transcribed, and freely gave
The Medici his work ; and then to save
Aldus great toil in Latin, and in Greek,

His page revised ;—more of renown to seek.
A man most marvellous. He was the head
Of Rome's great architects. At eighty led
To give his best for Sanzio's smile, 't is said.
With him Pope Julius often gladly talked
And watched, as high the arches where they walked
Upsprung. His name gives lustre to the time,
It is a name to grace my later rhyme.

At Rome.

XIV.

COLONNA in light cloisters cool and old
Oft mused. At last his life's rare dream he told.

Fra Colonna. In him not learning's new-born gifts alone,
But Beauty's charms, and Love, his being own ;
And his the Book long hid—nor yet to all
Revealed ;—the Artist's Bible I would call.

His book. In him the Lover, Artist, Poet, drunk
Deeply of Life ; as Pagan wrote, tho' Monk.
For nothing ever kept from dream of bliss
His dreaming mind. For him the Lover's kiss ;
For him rare Polia's charm. And he Love's law
Obeyed, and all Antiquity he saw.
He studied much, oft stayed his patient feet
Where long great Art had her most splendid seat.
Statue, rare Stone, Column, Slab, Plinth and Base,
Frieze, Trophy, Chariot, Font, each famous grace
Of Form ; veined marble, rose flushed, black or green ;
The majesty of Domes, Arches, or keen,
Vast Pyramid ; Baths ; Theatres ; all this,
You find within his book of Love's deep bliss :

The Book of Art it is where we are led
The Artist's and the Lover's way : now read
But by the few : no book of death but life ;
'T is of Poliphilus and his love-strife.

All-fecund nature, source of Pagan Art,
Bears no trace of the Christian's chosen part
I' the Monk's curious pages that yet hold
A lost Religion there, tho' strangely told ;—
A Book of the Renaissance, a rare book,
For Lovers, not for the profane to look
Within.

Its language dark hath not the worth
Of common speech ; as now, 't was strange at birth,
Nor ever had the limpid sense or terse
Style of the Tuscan ; writ in prose not verse.
Colonna nothing from fine Petrarch drew,
Boccaccio's work was what he kept in view.

Colonna's book is like Burne Jones's theme,
Remote from common life as some rich dream.
'T was writ for all who choose life's better part ;
Of Beauty much, Love much, and more of Art
It has to tell.

Aldus himself his best
Care gave to print its page, adorned and dressed

Its rare adorn-
ments.

By the Bellini, by Mantegna graced,
Or if not their hands all the drawings traced,
Some one of equal skill the drawings made,—
Barbara's, or Carpaccio's hand, 't is said ;
First for Colonna's Dream of Lover's true,
Hypnerotomachia's pictures drew.

The English
Version lost.

'T was put in English for rich Shakespeare's Age,
To lovers of sweet Sidney's life its page
Was dedicate ; yet was the Englished book
Long ago in Philistia lost ; none took
The care to save a copy ; many spurned
A work they thought fit to be quickly burned.
Philistia's mind was coarse, heavy her hand,
When Sidney, Essex, Shakespeare, all the band
Of England's brightest sweetest minds had fled.
The fond Monk's book of Art was no more read.
'T was called the Strife of Young Love in a Dream.
Hope not to see the Englished Page : nor deem
'T would give you aught of good, if Beauty, Art,
And Love, are not for you life's precious part.

Colonna's
work and
place.

Unloved was nature and free Pagan life,
Rejected during the Dark Ages' strife.
'T was long ere men the Truth would trust anew.
'T was long ere Pagan art was kept in view.
The Dance of Life, its forms of loveliness

They dared not praise, nor seek its blessedness
 Petrarch, Boccaccio and Colonna came,
 The Antique, Nature, Beauty, grew in fame.
 A darker time has come for us again ;
 For most of us the Renaissance is vain.
 More happy thou Colonna, though a monk,
 Tho' in a cloister half thy life was sunk ;
 More happy thou with thy rich dream of sense,
 Thy visions of antique magnificence—
 The very love-strife of thy ardent youth.
 To thee was shown the splendour full of Truth,
 E'en Beauty, face to face, and even breast
 To breast, Nature and Art together prest.
 Without a sense of form thy work was done :
 Tho' writ to praise all art it lacked the one,—
 The writer's sense of style, his sense to tell
 With less occult phrase all that him befel.
 Thou like a Gautier cloistered seem'st to me,
 Or e'en fine Spenser's peer thou seem'st to be ;
 Not that thy page hath aught of rhythmic flow ;
 For naught of sweet or stately verse but slow
 Prose is the form to give us thy rich mind :
 Its Dream was life and nature art-refined.

Swinburne's ophidian grace of changing phrase
 Were best for all Colonna saw to praise

Swinburne.

Couched on the glad grass, by a limpid pool,
Or bright stream, where the summer leaf is cool,
In Cytherea's all-enchanting Isle,
Where Beauty lives, and Youth, in Nature's smile.
Thy Art Giorgione, or great Titian's glow,
Or Rubens' freshness could that wonder show.
Ancient the charm that lured the cloistered sage,
Colonna studied bright Ovid's rich page.

Crasso, Verona's judge, famed, rich, and wise,
Was first to show Colonna's book,—a prize.
For him 't was printed at a great expense;
And not to leave it all without defence,
To the Duke of Urbino the strange book
Was dedicate,—that famed Duke who forsook
Sadly his home, his people, when like flame,
Borgia, with poison, steel, and treach'ry, came.
His courtly life gives charm to history's page.
For learning, culture, all that can engage
A spirit rare and bright he was well known;
His name in Fra Colonna's book is shown.

Colonna's
tomb.

Wouldst know where Fra Colonna sank to rest
In his ripe years by old religion blest?
In Venice he was born and Venice kept
His bones tho' now the place where last he slept

Is but a bricked-up wall. Traceless his stone
Sepulchral ; now his very dust is flown.
You still may see the monumental place
Where rich memorials his Church doth grace,—
That Gothic Church of the illustrious dead,
Beyond Saint Mark's, close to the water's bed ;
From it you see Saint Michael's tower rise
Glowing to morning as to evening skies.
There Fra Colonna's Church of John and Paul
Lifts grandly high its worn red Gothic wall.
Rich it hath been like fine Heraldic page,
Most rich with all the signs of storied age ;
For Tombs, and Trophies, and emblazoned Shields,
And stainedè glass brighter than greenest fields,
Incarnadine like running ruddy blood,
Blue like blue skies, or the sea's darker flood,
And marble old, and smooth, lustrous and veined,
And pictures of Great Masters, dust profaned,
By dirt and damp all dimmed, made sadly dark,
Still hold their solemn place, compel remark,
In rev'rence stay your step, and there in awe
And admiration make you pace the floor.

'T is well to think of Fra Colonna's name,
So much it adds to rich Trevisian fame.
Polia and Poliphilus both were seen

In yon delightful city, where, between
The walls flow clear two bright and living streams,—
Where limpid Sile rushes by and gleams,
Where Sile and Cagnano haste to meet,
And freshen as they flow Treviso's street.

XV.

WHEN light-leaved May all Nature doth invest,
 When all the Land is in fresh beauty drest,
 Look you to where, beyond the wave-like hills
 Bassano keeps her seat, and Brenta chills
 The bather's foot on summer's burning day ;
 Look you to where Vicenza hides away,
 So thick the leaves that screen so far afield ;
 Look you where tower and dome but seldom yield
 Distinctly to the farthest glance, so dim
 Far Padua seems on the horizon's rim ;
 Or dimmer still, and farther, Venice lies
 Revealed but beneath the clearest skies,—
 Yet then the sun you'll see smite her great tower,—
 'T is Saint Mark's shaft in light 'till sun-set hour.
 Let run your glance to where 'Treviso seems—
 'T is there,—that open city of clear streams ;
 And look from rosy east to golden west,
 Enchanting beauty, splendour freshly drest
 A hundred towns, a hundred glowing towers,
 Are bright to the swift daylight's shining hours.

Famed Cities
 seen from
 Asolo.

The marvels of the marvellous green plain,
 The shifting clouds, the changing skies of rain
 And light, the Land's old art, will give the eye
 Enough. The Delta doth not richer lie—
 With far-brought riches from old Nilus' bed
 With Egypt's wealth brought from its fountain head,—
 Than the Venetian Plain appears to me,
 By water freshly fed unceasingly.
 The Alps o'erwatch it all. They send their rain,
 Their storms, and driving blasts swiftly unchain;
 And sea-winds work their will; aërial forces
 Play, rage, lull, wake the Land in wildest courses;
 Sirocco-clouds blot out the Plain's fair face,
 In gloomy pall the mountains hide apace,—
 Swift as at a magician's touch the mask
 Falls off, clouds fly, and all the Land doth bask.
 But closer, dearer charms within deep dells
 Asolo's grassy hills unfold. Her spells
 Are woven with light leaves; with flowers; with grass;
 With soft winds that caress and fan and pass,
 While birds sing, and some happy shepherd girl
 Her sweeter song doth sing,—blown hair in curl,
 All soft and sunned and warm like amber old,
 Like crispèd glist'ning threads of dusty gold.
 Slowly she comes from Asolo's hill, or dale,
 Demure and modest in her thin white veil,

The Asolan
 Maid.

Called oft by the Duomo's deep toned bells.
Like a white dove she settles down, she tells
Her beads, or glides to touch the font's cool rim.
Behold her girlish grace and figure slim!
Her tranquil glance! It is the type I've seen
Against a solemn, shining disk, between
The tryptich's folding doors of Byzant gold,
Prayerful, and searching, earnest, mystic, old;
Unworn's the race; unchanged;—its type it keeps.
Here in the peasant's house young beauty sleeps
And here awakes, looks calmly, sweetly out,
Unread, untouched by all we rave about.

Come ye to Asolo's smooth flowing hills,
Come see what richly grows beside her rills,—
The flowers that bloom, colours that flush and fly:
Each season's gift; in Nature's lap to lie;
Swift change lets little last, from primrose gold
Bright'ning deep glades, to each new bud unrolled
Of blossoming trees (white like the wave's white foam)
That, wind-blown, grow round each Asolan home.
Its brightest time was when famed Cyprus' Queen
Brought from her Grecian Isle her gracious mien
To charm the Land,—the wave-washed city's gift
All these green dales, green fields, and hills up-lift.

Queen Cor-
naro and
Beinbo.

Here is her castle's tower, and below,
Her greater park was far afield ; there glow
On ruined walls the frescoes old, and yet
Her chapel lasts in Parco's meadows wet.
Here were her Cyprian hounds, horses, and hawks ;
And here beneath the beech-embowered walks,
O'er-arched by Summer leaves, in Summer shade,
With the Cornaro and her favourite maid,
Young Bembo passed, nor dreamed he yonder hill
Hid from his life so much of good and ill ;
He dreamed not of Lucrecia's love or name
The Cardinal's purple, nor his later fame.

Come ye to dream of all that courtly day,
See castle ruins that once held each way,
The crumbling dark walls of a fiercer time,
On each historic hill named in old rhyme ?
These walls crown not each grassy summit's brow
As when strong mail-clad men, in strait ways (now
Made broad for our life and the peasant's load)
Went to and fro, and the knight, splendid, rode ;
Page, man at arms, or gallant squire on horse,
Saw most of what we see in each day's course,
What smiles in light, and flows in rhythmic lines—
These billowy woods, how each green hill declines,

How all the mountains fall in mighty waves—
Earth waves hard beaten by each wind that raves
O'er these green hills from yonder bluer bar
Where throbs where sinks yon burning Planet far.

XVI.

BY the steep road-side's leafy chapel shrine
The peasants kneel devout at day's decline,
Placid in the stillness there doth seem to float
The plaintive sound of twilight bells remote.
The cloud's film rosy in the evening skies
Pales to a fainter tint as daylight dies.
The dark'ning mountains take a bluer shade,
Intensely blue, in majesty displayed.
Night deepens in the hollows of the hills,
More lightly broods above the Plain and fills
And hides the quiet Land in darkness drest :
Nature in silence seems in solemn rest.
Asolan nights. 'T is summer's plenitude ! Clear nights of May
Starred with magnificence undreamt by day ;
The Planets seem to throb and deeply glow,
And sprinkled stars drift over Asolo.
They swarm in the dark airy Dome of Night.
Soundless to us the realms of dazzling light.
And looked they so above far lives of yore ?
Not less remote nor less they filled with awe ;

All mute to quest'ning glance, and all aglow ;
Like greater worlds than ours, to come and go ;
They seem to throb with light, now beaming down
Some life to crown with bliss, or on it frown.

'T is fine to see the skies of Asolo,
To see the stars and the great Planets glow,
Or Heaven bare to the upspringing sun,
Resplendent his triumphant course to run ;
To see far streaming vapours, pomp of cloud
In lucid space immeasurable, proud
Day's bright hours go in light, or deep'ning shade,
And still Night come when Day's last glow doth fade.

O skies of Asolo! Oft have I seen
The storm rise sudden darkening her green
Hills, dark'ning all the vast far-stretching Plain,—
A sea of rippling leaves and growing grain ;
Have seen it come when Grappa's brow is white,
Have seen it deepen, spread and take wild flight
By roaring winds far driven, fiercely sped,
Twisting and tearing, lashing over head
Convulsèd clouds unto their course kept true,
Swift messengers of wrath startling to view.
And I have seen the raging Tempest black
With wilder wind urged on its blasting track ;

Skies and
storins.

And I have seen the clouds piled grandly high,
 In serene air enchanting to the eye ;—
 Frail towers and toppling baseless battlements ;
 Castles 'mid space, or brief proud armaments ;
 In level lines of rest, shining or grey ;
 Oft spread like angel's wings to brighten day ;
 Then earth itself shows us its fairest face ;
 Asolo's quiet ways the foot may pace
 Where birds—the air's quick lovers—with sharp cry,
 Or silent all, in wild alarm dart by,
 Startled when, in the leafy hidden lanes,
 A sudden step the lonely place profanes.
 By leaves o'er-arched her many shady ways
 Are cool and dark in summer's clearest days.
 A silver runlet keeps both moist and fresh
 The stony bed beneath the leaf's loose mesh.
 In June, the greenest time, deep is the shade
 Under the beechen leaf, all deeper made
 By roof of twisted twig, and branch, and vine ;
 Stripped of the season's dress so rich and fine
 The summer long, and in late Autumn shed,
 Grim, rugged, gnarled, and lopped, and seeming dead ;
 All grey, or black with lichen, green with moss ;
 In winter trunk and branches show their loss.
 E'en then an arabesque of strange design
 They seem with each twig's twisted leafless line.

Asolan lanes.

In summer the quick lizard furtive runs
Rustling the leaves ; watchful the touch it shuns.
The rare snake, unsuspected, sudden stops
Your step when from the branch noiseless he drops,
Fixes your glance with glitter of his keen
Eye, like an evil star, a moment seen.
Its cold light, steel-like, shines in a dark place,—
'T is there—'t is gone—silent—without a trace.

XVII.

NOR will I fail to tell of music sweet,
Of the old bell that rings above the street,
The Tower's bell! how oft it richly floats
Adown, how sadly ebb away its notes.
Nor less the Duomo's bell! its clear tone rolls
More lightly out to waken simple souls.
Sweet ancient bells how dear their magic sound!
They stir in waves the quiet air around,
And the unresting hours in music flow.
The speeding hours of charming Asolo.
A sadder sound they have when daylight dies.
Then for the dead—tho' more than one there lies
Now all forgot—dear memory wakes; for some
A prayer evokes,—a thought of peace for dumb
And lost and buried love. Twice have I felt
For Asolo's dead drear grief. While Sorrow knelt.
Warm tears welled up for youth and force cut down.
Once for a life of unfulfilled renown;
Once for a life that like a flower grew,
And from its native hills its beauty drew.

What verse were best its loss, and simplest days
To tell, and all a peasant maid's dear ways?
To hold her vanished self, and hold from Night
A grace, a charm that often gave delight?

CANDIDA : AN ELEGY.

YOUNG Cándida is gone ! her dear life spent !
She was a child when first with her I went
Down grassy slopes to the clear river's brink,
There where the leaf is cool and cattle drink.

My Cándida ! For eighteen years all told
She lived a glowing thing, and now is cold,
Was quick and light of foot, in beauty grew,
Went singing like a bird ere grief she knew.

Grief came, and Sorrow stayed with her ; her song
Was stopped—'t is now a year. She was not strong,
And when her mother died, a change took place
In her slim form, a change in her dear face.

She lost her smile. O Cándida did fade !
Slow, week by week, a flower, drooped the maid.
She strangely still became. At night a voice
Was calling her, she said, nor left her choice

But e'en to go to where her mother slept,
Reluctant, go, to where the dead are kept.
My Cànida! gone like a light put out,
A flame quick spent : and now alas ! about

Her place, where she a living thing oft ran,
The joy is fled that with her life began.
A peasant child, a peasant girl she grew
From birth to death, no other splendour knew

Than the year's changing skies, the pomp of cloud
Aflame, the racing rays of Dawn, and proud
Day splendid with all light, star-lit the Dome
Of Heaven, the Moon ride high above her home ;

All the fair dress of dewy grassy fields
When flowers begin to bloom, and when like shields
Of silver, ev'ry little pool bright shines
With light, and tender leaves are on the vines.

At Shrine, her step she stopped when day was done ;
To Church, she often went ere rise of sun ;
To *Festa* too, when the slow peasants all
Thronged, singing, crossed and on their knees did fall.

Quick Cànida there husked the corn, raked hay,
And ev'ry work, tho' hard, to her was play.

She ran, she flew to bring her sheep all back,
She cried aloud at brindle cow or black.

And oft she smiled, and wondered silently
When first I drew her face most patiently :
Her features fine I traced with loving care,
And the hue of her very cheek,—less fair

Than rich and warm ;—her wide and wond'ring eyes,
Like stars, now closed and dark beneath these skies.
Bright Cànvida is gone and nevermore
Shall I see Cànvida skip gay before

My step ;—but her, oft will I see again,
As low she lay like a hurt bird, in pain.
I saw her last, prone on her bed. So meek
She looked ! for Death was near his prey to seek.

Poor frightened child ! Her great eyes greater seemed,
Her flutt'ring spirit moaned, and wildly gleamed
And fluttered there her struggling life within
Her form, O then so slight and sadly thin.

Farewell my little peasant maid at rest !
Whether once more upon thy mother's breast,

Or cold beside her, in the still graveyard.
Farewell! Thy life was brief, thy death was hard.

Dumb, thy dwarfed, crookèd sister, always ill,
Is left to live. Thy grandmother thee still
Survives; and all within thy home out-last
Thy little life, that, like a flame, sped fast.

All is not lost when all 's unseen and fled.
A life once dear, a form, a face, tho' dead
To sense, hath yet its presence fair and sweet,
Its place, where spirit doth with spirit meet.
Thee Càndida still do I see apart,
Enshrined, endeared, still living in my heart.
Safe from the waste and drift of passing years.
—Safe kept is all that touched us once to tears.

Epitaph.

XVIII.

Bianchetti.

A GRAVER loss was Asolo's when died
That valiant son who to his dear hill-side
Returned to breathe his last ; once won to go
Where louder rumour lives, and feel the glow
Of quicker life, where greater prizes are,
And try his force led by ambition's star.
His rapid mind, with reading ripely stored,
His spirit bold, his eager will o'erawed
By few, or none, urged him to dare and strive ;
To reach the first seemed born.—He was alive.
Bianchetti ! gladly grasped I thy warm hand ;
I heard thee speak ; foremost I saw thee stand ;
Knew thee impetuous, frank, and bold, and true,—
A son of modern Italy ; and knew
Thee peer of young Italia's best, a light
From Asolo, now lost in death's deep night.
Not on sepulchral urn thy name doth last
Alone ; in living minds and hearts kept fast.
For what thou wast, now, with a glowing thought,
In memory of thee, I, rev'rent, sought

Fresh foreign bay to deck thy tomb, proud son
Of Asolo, Soldier of Thought, undone
Mid march.

Valèrio, this for Farewell,
This for Remembrance. Oh, when sounds the bell
For the lone dead, tho' low, and cold, and still,
Thou'rt not forgot there, 'neath Saint Anna's hill.
I call thee e'en in death not all unblest.
The air that blew about thy youth is best—
O'er thy last sleep and dust blows pure and sweet ;
Thy grave is not beyond thy loved one's feet,
Nor chill of death reached thee beyond their hand ;
Not 'neath far alien skies of foreign land
Low sank thy head. As on a mother's breast
Asolan earth folds thee in its hushed rest.

XIX.

Browning at
Asolo.

A POET of ripe England's busy race
Was charmed with Asolo, his chosen place.
In his best day, here, all unknown he came
And wrote his rich verse for immortal fame.
Pippa and *Ottima*, *Jules* and his bride,
All these are Browning's gifts ; they still abide,
With more that stirred his spirit's living force
When fresh and young he was in life's swift course.
His steps I've followed, and his visions known
E'en here where he out-watched the stars alone ;
Here where he paced or paused beneath the moon,
And tried his spirit's growing strength, and soon,
And oft, trod past the little city's gate
To climb these hills the sun's uprising state
To see ; or dawn ; or star by star put out,
And glad'ning hast'ning Day the darkness flout ;
Or late behold the crescent sudden sink ;
The twilight's mysteries, and cool eve shrink,
Night come.

The stir of trembling leaves, bird's song,

The runlet that once wet his foot,—these long
Have I known, led by his strong early verse,
By the fine verbal magic of his terse
And sounding passion's speech ; warmed by his fire ;
Oft went to see Day, wrapt in gold, expire,
Or watch that Sorceress, the changing Moon,
The gliding queen of Night, or late or soon
Weave her quick spells 'mid clouds sped by the wind,
And Nature made all for her Poet's mind.

I met him once walking at Asolo
When billowy clouds dazzling as driven snow
Glorious arose, grandly 'gainst the blue sky.
I stopped with him to see up-lifted high
In air all that piled pomp ; which seemed in rest,
But struck by winds unseen, fast changed, wind-pressed.
“ Like clouds in bad old pictures often seen
“ They are ” he said. “ How fine above the green
In space so deeply blue.” His cordial speech
Prolonged, he looked to where, distinctly each
Rough stone of the strange *Rocca*—once so feared—
Naked, abrupt, enduring, grim appeared.
“ There, when I first came Asolo to see,
“ A hawk's nest was atop the wall ; a tree ;
“ And shrubs ; and clinging ivy green. At last
“ The hawk was shot, and all the shrubs down-cast ;

"All's gone" he said, "See, not a plant is left;
 "The walls are scraped and bare, of verdure reft."
 Yet was I richer made by the quick note
 Of that wild bird wheeling there, seen to float
 Or fly; and by a Poet watched not lost;
 Kept by a mind that nothing 'scaped or forced,—
 So living was it. The hawk seemed to suit
 The lonely Ruin's wall, blank, strange and mute.
 Often shall I see that wild bird up there—
 A moving spot, a fleck in the pure air—
 Intent i' the sky, watchful to swoop for prey—
 Ecelin's soul come back to our own day!
 Again sent back! incorporate! unfit
 A place to have where smiling peace doth sit,
 Where serene hours swiftly come and go,
 Joyous or solemnly at Asolo.
 Here to strong Browning once, "Good bye" I said—
 "Good bye" to him who now is with the dead—
 A farewell to the man who passed away.
 But to the Poet no farewell's to say.
 He yet remains; his place he seems to fill—
 A Presence is on this Asolan Hill.

Asolo, 1889.

A NOTE.

CONCERNING THE AMBER ISLES OF THE EARLY WORLD.

THE outlook south from the Asolan hills to all that region of strange interest—the region of the Black Lake, alluded to by Aristotle—in the neighbourhood of the Po,—the Eridanus of the ancient geographers,—with its myth of Phaethon, significant of the fiery devastation of ancient Italy—has much to engage the imagination.

Although it is a long look back to the primordial World of tradition, and the indications of it few, they are expressive of portentous events, and impress the mind with a sense of time, of force, of change.

The cataclysm of the old Saturnian Land; the wrenching off of that portion of the Italic peninsula since called the island of Sicily, and the disappearance in one night of Atlantis, are enough to indicate the character and extent of the frightful forces,—whether burnt by fire, rent by earthquake, washed away, or submerged by deluge—that destroyed the most ancient Italy of which we have either myth or tradition; drove its inhabitants from the soil, and kept the Land a solitude until it was re-occupied by Pelasgic Greeks who, on the Adriatic coast, founded Spina, which flourished some eight hundred years, though all trace of it was lost at the end of the first century of our Era.

Fugitives after the fall of Troy, finding the rocky glades and glens of Thrace, which they first sought, inadequate to support them, consulted the Oracle, and were told to find a home on the Adriatic coast. They set sail for it as to a country not unknown to their ancestors, and were driven ashore close to one of the mouths of the Po, at that time, it is supposed, much nearer than it is now to the Euganean hills. The argument of the Abbé Fortis induces me to think that the famous *Insulae Electrides* were at the mouth of that river, and probably were the very Euganean hills, now rising abruptly out of the Venetian Plain, midway between the present course of the Po south (the limit of the ancient Veneto) and the pre-alpine slopes north of the Venetian mainland.

The *palude* of Commacchio "which did not even exist at the beginning of our epoch," covers, it is conjectured, the site of the lost city which furnished Italian amber, though it is still an open and much discussed question, whether, to meet the enormous consumption of Amber in ancient Italy, the chief supply came from the far-away Baltic, brought by Etruscan traffickers, or was furnished by the Amber Isles. The greatest producer of Amber then, as now, may have been the Baltic, but there is some reason to believe that the red Amber of the old Italic tombs is Amber of Italy, which was one of the chief sources of the legendary wealth of the capital of the Amber Isles, then mistress of the Adriatic. The islands of its lagoons, which extended from the Po to the Tagliamento, were inhabited by a primitive race even prior to the coming of the Trojan fugitives.

The discoveries at Torcello afford evidence that the Adriatic lagoons were peopled ages prior to the flight of the inhabitants of the mainland cities of Heraclea and Altinum, thirteen hundred years ago; so picturesquely described by Mr. Ruskin;—"fugitives flying from the sword of Atilla to the mud islands of the lagoons,

while the far horizon was lurid with the flames of their burning homes."

The islands of the lagoons had their primitive inhabitants, as far back as the age of stone, who lived by fishing and hunting. The pre-historic remains, utensils and instruments, found by Sig. Cav. Battglini, at Torcello, are similar to the objects found amongst the debris of the lake dwellers of Switzerland. Not to the time of that primitive race but to its first civilizers, whether the great and richly endowed original Italic race of Mazoldi's interesting argument, or to the first adventurous sailors and builders and merchants from Greece and the Black sea-coast, it is that we must look for the occurrences that have given so great a name to the Eridanus¹ of Greek tale and Latin Myth.

Although Heroditus professed himself unable to speak with certainty of it, and some Geographers have concluded that "it can be no other than the Rhodanus which flows into the Vistula near Dantzig," we are inclined to adopt the conclusion of certain ancient and modern authors who affirm it to be the river Po, whose mighty waters at that remote time flowed close to the Volcanic Isles of the Early World.

Note to p. 28. *Bergamo keeps the portrait.* Though now somewhat discredited as a portrait of Borgia, yet its claims are not left without support. It has features like the accepted profile of his face.

¹ *That fabulous and ubiquitous river of the ancients, considered by the later Roman writers to be the same as the Padus (Po) was supposed to descend to the infernal regions from the circumstance that not far from its source it passed for two miles underground.—BRYCE, Notes on the Æneid.*



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